

CHAPTER 4

Habermas's Communicative Rationality

Habermas's intentions in the project of communicative rationality have much in common with those of Giddens. Both wish to avoid the weaknesses of the philosophy of consciousness and neopositivism; to reconstruct the classics; and, in this way, to fulfill the promise of the Enlightenment in modernity. But unlike Giddens, Habermas engages modernity explicitly and stands in clear contradistinction to postmodernity. He is intent on emancipation from the pathologies of modernity through the principles of justice. He revives Critical Theory in order to act positively towards justice and against alienation in the lifeworld (Bernstein 1995, 29).

Also unlike Giddens, Habermas's redefinition of social theory returns to the rationality project for its point of departure. He introduces a new analytical distinction to rationality, namely, that between instrumental and communicative rationality. The former has been dominant in the classics, while the latter introduces a less subject-centred notion of rationality, one that focuses on understanding in social action rather than simply on goal-purposive action. Since he proposes communicative rationality as the means to restoring confidence to act in late modern society, it can be expected that he makes clear the nature of the participation of agents whose tasks it is to reach understanding.

However, a significant weakness of Habermas's philosophical/theoretic project for achieving emancipation in a rejuvenated modernity project is that he has portrayed the agent, or progenitor of change and reform, as shadowy or

at least indistinct, relative to the group. While he uses language to connect instrumental action and communicative action, he neither clarifies the nature or power of the agent, nor does he set out the mechanisms by which personal and collective meanings are connected in everyday life. These shortfalls make it difficult for his theory to locate both agent wants (Dandeker 1983, 205) and the role of emancipatory or healing agents in the constitution of systems of interaction. In this chapter I will explore how Habermas comes to obscure the healing agent in his project of communicative rationality, evolution and the differentiation of Occidental society. Of particular merit for the status of agency and the agent will be the potential of his concepts of the dimensions of rationality, open reciprocity and ethics to locate the pragmatic restorative agent in the system in the lifeworld. This reparation and setting free of the attenuated agent of communicative action sets the conditions necessary in Chapter 7 to develop a concept of agency more appropriate to late modernity.

Part One of this chapter is an investigation of the rationale, earlier development and key themes of Habermas's project. This is a complex task because of the evolving, reflexive and practical intent of his work, and because of his preparedness to respond to his critics even at the risk of seeming inconsistent (Knodt 1994, 82). In Part Two, the immanent logic of communicative rationality is examined with a view to showing the obfuscation of the agent and the omission of any mechanism of pragmatic agency that allows agents to '...communicatively transfigure themselves and their relations with others' (Bernstein 1995, 59). In Part Three, those parts of the theory with the potential for revealing the nature of the reflexive, interpretive agent will be highlighted. In Part Four, the more prominent criticisms of communicative rationality germane to the restoration of pragmatic agency are examined. The lack of a theory of the agent and of the mechanisms of interaction in Habermas's pragmatic project becomes clear despite his

reference to the capabilities of the agent, to judgment and to identity as endemic to communicative action and emancipation.

Part One: The why, how and what of communicative rationality

Habermas's immediate objective is to understand the causes of the 'crises' that prevail in the modern Social Welfare State and to propose transforming it without the negation of the many achievements that have accompanied the evolution to modernity. His goal, therefore, is to maintain the valuable core of the modern through a rigorous and emancipatory critique of modernity. To this end he revises and rebuilds the classics and Marx's historical materialism in particular. He approaches his task as an ongoing dialogue of research and debate with social scientists (Bernstein, R. 1985, 15; Rasmussen 1990, 3; Honneth 1991, 279; Strydom 1992, 83) on issues that are traditional to historical materialism and the Frankfurt School. So, by a process of suggestion and responding to criticism, he develops his theory of communicative action as an alternative theory of emancipation: one with a supposedly more mature and universal rationality than that generally associated with the early 'instrumentality' of the Marxist critique of liberal capitalism.

Habermas builds his alternative project upon the work of the Frankfurt School which had a specific interest in critique of the social order with the express purpose of suggesting practical action in the interests of the future. This school did not advance a rigid political platform of the type associated with traditional Marxism, preferring instead to allow for historical flux and development and for the tenet that '...liberation entails a process of *self-emancipation* and *self-creation*' (Held 1980, 25-26). Their project rested upon the conviction that people were truly rational and that history was also a construction of the will and consciousness. Habermas too acts in this mould and responds particularly to the bleak analysis of Horkheimer and Adorno that

the Enlightenment is self-destructing: that '..., it is no longer possible to place hope in the liberating force of enlightenment' (Habermas 1987b, 106) because reason and domination bind culture everywhere.

Furthermore, Habermas understood his predecessors to emphasise the dialectical socio-cultural component of Marx's social theory. This he saw as a reaction to the emerging post World War 1 disillusionment with the dogmatic materialistic foundationalism associated with the political-economic Marxists. He attempts to overcome both the scepticism that Horkheimer and Adorno had for reason, and the either/or exclusiveness that he himself identified as occurring between the dialectical and materialist components of Marxism. He introduces instead the concepts of 'labor' and 'interaction' (or 'instrumental' and 'communicative rationality') which are mutually inclusive rather than exclusive. These he argues were distinctions implicit to Marx's work anyway (McCarthy T. 1976, xxii). He intends his reconstruction of historical materialism '...to make possible a conceptualization of the social-life context that is tailored to the paradoxes of modernity' (Habermas 1984b, xl). He also argues for the sustained value of modernity in science, law, morality and aesthetics (Habermas 1987b, 113).

Habermas locates his critical project between philosophy and certain areas of the social sciences (Habermas 1991, 214). It is a complex theoretic approach that includes a philosophy of history, sociology, commonsense understandings and intuition. His project for emancipation is multilevelled and aimed at both substantive and theoretic verification. At the substantive level of motivation, Habermas's communicative action is intended to counter what he calls the legitimation crisis facing welfare-capitalism. Problems of legitimation have arisen in these societies and are caused by '...a fundamental conflict built into their very structure, a conflict between the social welfare responsibilities of mass democracies and the functional conditions of the

capitalist economy' (McCarthy T. 1979, xxiv). The fiscal and reformist policy of the State that is targeted at the dysfunctional side effects of the economy is itself restricted in how far it can go before eliminating the very forces that function within the economy and make it viable. The side effects of this 'crisis of legitimacy' are evident in '..., a sharpened struggle over distribution, economic instability, the breakdown of reform politics, and even the disintegration of motivational patterns essential to capitalist society...' (McCarthy T. 1979, xxiv).

Habermas intends his theory of communicative rationality, and his thesis of the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' in particular, to be the means for reflecting upon the historical contexts that have constituted the present crisis of modernity. He sets out also to provide the process for applying alternatives within the context of the present. This refers to his concepts of communicative action and ideal-speech. His critique therefore is a means to reflect upon and discern what is distorted and what is not, what can be changed, and the means to that end. In this Habermas is careful to retain the traditional interests of German idealism in truth, reason, beauty and the elucidation of future possibilities (Thompson and Held 1982, 3).

Habermas's views have undergone considerable development since he first came to prominence in the 1950's. From the outset, he was critical of rationality as presented in the legacy of the Enlightenment or the philosophy of consciousness (Habermas 1987b), but he is not willing to '...precipitate abandonment of the achievements of modernity' (McCarthy T. 1984, v). He draws from a wide range of classical philosophers and sociologists such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mead, Horkheimer, Adorno and Parsons because they still have contemporary importance for him, and he goes beyond them by way of criticism and of overcoming their weaknesses. Numerous issues are

addressed over the decades since the fifties (Habermas 1990, 1993; Calhoun 1992; Honneth and Joas 1991) but his reflection upon and utilisation of *reflexivity*, as social action and as system initiated, has remained paramount.

In the fifties and sixties Habermas expressed concern over the demise of the public sphere and good citizen practice (Outhwaite 1994, 9) and its replacement with a scientific and technically directed view of political science. The autonomous public sphere (Habermas 1987b, 364) represented the earlier Greek practice of free speech and debate among the citizens of the polis. Habermas is of the view that this practice, evident in earlier bourgeois capitalism, was not fully realised in late modernity because of the increasing State and Corporate compromises that had grown to exclude the public. Emphasis fell upon technically directed politics and administration at the expense of debate amongst a public that acted to keep a balance upon the body politic. The principles of commodity exchange began more and more to undercut the autonomy of forums potentially critical of the status quo (Thompson and Held 1982, 4-5). This development was concurrent with the growing regard for science and scientism in capitalist society.

By the late sixties Habermas had built a comprehension of society as historical, differentiated and in need of an enlightened self reflexive political practice. In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1986) he had categorised the bonds between types of knowledge and specific human intentions, and pointed out their methodological differences. His three types of knowledge were empirical-analytical knowledge, historical-hermeneutical knowledge and critical science. He explained these types of knowledge as having evolved within the deeper rationality that was characteristic of societies and individuals. Yet he detected that in the middle to late twentieth century, a rationality crisis had crystallised in welfare capitalism. Given this situation, he discerned a need for a critical theory of this 'State versus the masses' crisis

of capitalism; for a '...detailed articulation of the logic, methodology, or structure of this type of theory' (McCarthy T. 1979, x). The prevailing neo-positivist logic of the natural sciences was inadequate for such a task because it required a grasp of the 'meanings' that constitute social reality. He concluded that a methodology that integrates interpretive understanding, critique of ideology and historical analysis was needed and it is to this task that he applied himself through the seventies, eighties and early nineties.

To return to his departure from the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas developed his philosophy of communication paradigm in the context of the radical critique of reason. He confronts poststructuralism and postmodernism as well as those conservatives in sociology who wished to return to overarching metaphysics. His argument to the former is essentially that it is impossible to legitimate a critique of reason using a principle exterior to reason itself because the result is a totalising and self referential critique (Noys 1997, 59). His arguments are developed in his books *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987b) and *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992a). In the former, he objects to the levelling of the rationality project in postmodernism via an '*undialectical* rejection of subjectivity' (Habermas 1987b, 337) by authors such as Nietzsche, Derrida and Foucault. This approach, he argues, ignores the paradoxes that exist in modernity like the contradictions between enlightenment and emancipation; or freedom guaranteed in law that is endangered by that selfsame beneficiary; or emancipation from conventional morality only to succumb to the loss of self in post-conventional morality.

As an alternative to the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas proposes 'discourse ethics' grounded upon the universal intuition for language competence and understanding amongst people. This intersubjective alternative overcomes the mirror-image difficulty associated with the philosophy of consciousness. By mirror-image is meant that the converse side

of an autonomy that is pressed into *subject-object relationships* is the repression of the self. This is because the *expressive subject* must surrender itself for fear of externalising itself in objects (Habermas 1987b, 292). Habermas's contention, discussed earlier in Chapter 2 (pages 53-54) is that the problem of the subject as object to itself is overcome through a linguistic philosophy which can now interpose symbols and socialisation between the conscious self and the 'self as object'.

Habermas also intends his intersubjective alternative to the philosophy of consciousness to avoid arbitrary and totalitarian action. This earlier paradigm privileged the cognitive-instrumental relations of subjects/agents to the world (Passerin d'Entreves 1996, 32) and enhanced the formulation of what postmodernist sceptically refer to as 'grand narratives'. Communicative rationality is to be an appropriate alternative because it is '...based on the free interplay of cognitive with moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive elements,...' (Passerin d'Entreves 1996, 32). Importantly, Habermas also makes the controversial claim that his theory of communication '...cannot stray into foundationalist by-ways' (Habermas 1987a, 400).

In *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992a), Habermas defends his 'discourse ethic' or universal pragmatic against postmodernist arguments and against calls for a return to overarching metaphysical and foundational approaches. In relation to the latter, he defends his project against accusations of championing '...the universal *against* the individual, otherness, and difference. On the contrary, he attempts to rescue the individual from complete absorption into the particular contexts in which it is always embedded' (Hohengarten 1992, xi-xii). Most significantly for the discussion of agency or the agent, the individual is theorised to be as significant as the universal but

with the understanding that it is intersubjectively constituted; '...the relationship to a community is what makes the practical relation-to-self possible' (Hohengarten 1992, xvii).

As opposed to the metatheoretic arm of his discussion, at the heart of Habermas's substantive discussion of the crisis of advanced capitalism lies his thesis of the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' by the systems media of money and power. It will be fleshed out in more detail later, but for now the general framework of his thesis on 'crisis' - or change in the identity of the system - is as follows. The evolution of society occurs in conjunction with the reflexive transformation of the relations between the *material* forces of production and the prevailing *symbolic* or normative order. These two are connected by the principles of social organisation. Should these principles of social organisation fail to accommodate the interaction between the material forces of production, such as Economic and State systems, and the symbolic normative order such as the Lifeworld of interpersonal relations, then a 'steering problem' or crisis is the result. This example is of an economic crisis. There are other forms of crisis, including a crisis of rationality, a crisis of legitimation and a personal crises. A crisis of rationality occurs when there is overmuch or too little State intervention or planning in the Economy. A legitimation or motivation crisis exists when the government fails to get the amount of legitimacy it needs from social actors in the circumstances of advanced capitalism (Thompson and Held 1982, 10; Smith 1991, 185).

Personal crises, in their turn, occur within the communicative practice of the lifeworld, where identity is shaped and formed. An agent cannot distance self from this lifeworld practice, as can be done for institutions of the social world. Also endemic to culture (and lifeworld) are values that allow agents to distinguish between mere life and ideas of 'the good life' (Habermas 1990, 177). Such ideas shape individual and group identity to the extent that a person who

questions the overriding forms of life that have shaped his identity questions his very existence. Herein lies a life crisis. Here is a sphere of agent participation in the transformation of society, culture and personality which is little developed by Habermas.

So what are the principles of organisation that shape systems and selves? They are best demonstrated through Habermas's threefold typology of social formations or organisations.

- * Primitive social formations. Age, sex and kinship are the dominant organising principles of archaic and hierarchical societies.
- * Traditional social formations. Political class domination and a bureaucracy that serves the hegemony of the landowning class are the dominant principles.
- * Liberal and advanced capitalism. The first is characterised by two primary oppositions, namely, capital versus wage labour and state versus society. The second is characterised by advanced administrative control of the economy and intermittent crises of the economy, rationality and legitimation or motivation. These latter result from the colonisation of the lifeworld by the systems media of money and power.

To return briefly to the material-symbolic dichotomy, Habermas's analysis of the 'crises' of modernity also distinguishes from within this dichotomy, *two* processes of differentiation, namely, societal modernisation and cultural modernisation. The process of societal modernisation refers to the differentiation from classical capitalism towards the system-lifeworld dichotomy that is now symptomatic of welfare capitalist society. The process of cultural modernisation is the differentiation from the 'world view philosophy' of pre-industrial society towards a more plural, secular and scientific interpretation of social life. This process involves differentiation into separate value spheres such as law, science, religion, aesthetics, etcetera; each sphere

demonstrating the capacity for self reflexivity, critical appraisal and reproduction/reconstruction.

This second process of modernisation, or evolutionary rationalisation away from the traditional and sacred, makes social interaction more dependent than before on consensus formation grounded in the authority of the better argument (Brand 1990, 36). The growing prevalence of reflexivity and criticism within the components of the lifeworld requires of the agents a participation within this consensus formation if anomie and the negative material effects of the systems are to be diminished or avoided. To this end agents are assumed to be responsible and accountable (Habermas 1990, 162): they have a duty to participate, to understand, to avoid deception, and to assert their identities. These responsibilities require in turn that agents become reflexive, critical and industrious about what identities they construct for themselves as persons or groups. These manifest capabilities of the agent or agency are crucial components therefore for discerning and making real the nature of Habermas's reflexive, interpretive agent.

However, Habermas deals '...minimally with the problem of self-identity and its relation to culture' (Wuthnow, Davison, Bergeson and Kurzweil 1984, 238). There is no extended treatment of the relation between self and society or of the subjectivity of the agent '...', the self is no longer a subjective property of individual consciousness but an objective component of culture itself (Wuthnow et al. 1984, 239). With Habermas's critical approach then, the individual, in terms of any counterfactual or political action, can offer opposition to society only through the group. The individuality of the agent is so submerged in the language of discourse and the needs of the community that access to self is equated with the access of others to the agent in discourse (Brand 1990, 122).

Having sketched these cornerstones of Habermas's project, I turn now to a closer definition of the system versus lifeworld relation in order to examine its relation to the metatheory of communicative action. Essentially, the system-lifeworld dichotomy analyses and explains what it is that ails late modernity, whereas the discourse ethic of communicative action, while endemic to the lifeworld, is part of the solution - without recourse to an overriding prescriptive and universal practice.

For understanding the system, Habermas draws cautiously upon Parsons's functionalism which deems systems to be both independent of individuals or agents in society and as reproducing themselves, that is, having a logic and regularities of their own. For Habermas, systems are integrated through the media of money (economy) and power (state). In contrast, the lifeworld is '...the horizon within which communicative actions are "always already" moving...(Habermas 1987a, 119). Here are to be found '...self-evident features of an intuitively present, prereflexively known form of life presupposed to be unproblematical to which they have become culturally accustomed and which has to be imbued in them through socialization' (Habermas 1991, 244). Examples include the relations between family members or friends and those of democratic debate and participation in the political sphere by agents acting as citizen-clients. Despite its increasing subjugation by systems, the lifeworld has these two spheres that remain socially integrated as the private (family) and public (political) spheres. Theoretically, this dichotomy of public and private allows social scientists to view both structure and interrelationships in a 'sophisticated way' (Benhabib and Cornell 1987, 6).

That the lifeworld is colonised by the systems is a consequence of an affinity to strategic-purpose rationality present in the latter. Habermas has been at pains though, to emphasise that instrumental rationality is not embodied in media-guided interactions but rather that a functional form of

reason is present to system interaction (Habermas 1991, 258). This means that economic or political power, linked to an office or person, has been taken into the structure and function of systems and is steered by money and/or politics. These system domains of inter-relations are now linked instrumentally and *only indirectly* through the 'agency of consensus mechanisms' (Habermas 1991, 256). This does not mean that media-steered actions or options are norm-free because of their affinity to strategic-purposive rationality. Rather, '...the integration of these action systems is *in the final instance* not based on the potential for social integration of communicative actions and the lifeworld background thereof - these systems make use of both [strategic-purposive and communicative action]' (Habermas 1991, 257). On the other hand, the potential for social integration in communicative rationality means a context that connotes the '...unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, ..., assure themselves of the unity of both the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld' (Habermas 1984 b, 10).

The uninitiated reader of Habermas may find an early description from McCarthy (1979, xvii) useful for getting a handle on this very complex project which is continuously modified by Habermas. (It helps me to show the levels at which my thesis draws its direction) McCarthy's point is that Habermas's critical theory operates at three levels of debate and research. The highest level, and Habermas's primary goal, is a theory of social evolution or a reconstruction of historical materialism (McCarthy T. 1979, xvii). A primary tenet here is that social evolution has its own logic apart from the 'relations of production' processes. He also points to a distinction between the logic of development in normative structures and the dynamics of this development - that is, an evolutionary development without a predetermined outcome. The

former refers to the increasingly complex transformations occurring within the 'logic' of an historic society; the latter refers to the 'contingent boundary conditions and empirical learning processes' that affect whether or not new structures arise (McCarthy T. 1979, xxii).

The middle level of the project is a theory of socialisation or the acquisition of communicative competence. Habermas adopts a competence-development approach to social action so that critical theory is linked to the autonomous self. He '...starts from the interdependence of personality structures and social structures, of forms of identity and forms of social integration;...' (McCarthy T. 1979, xix). *Habermas is still in the process of working out the pragmatic mechanisms of interaction and the boundaries of his developmental approach.* It is here too, in the link between personality and structure, that my thesis originates and draws its direction.

The ground level of the project is a general theory of communication that claims universal pragmatics (McCarthy T. 1979, xvii; Habermas 1990). The basis of this theory is language. The claim is that these symbols of intersubjective meaning are vital to a theory that seeks to appropriate methodology, critique and history to an understanding of advanced capitalism. Language acts as the base for a pragmatic connection of the speakers and listeners to the objective, normative and internal world orders of reality that are extralinguistic. The connection is made through validity claims; here too is another source and origin of my thesis.

I have paraphrased Habermas's own description of his critique in order to emphasise that it is inescapably bound to the conflicts, contradictions and tensions of the 'real' world for which he intended it. According to him the neo-conservatives of our time want to preserve economic and social modernisation but are countered by a critique aimed at the dysfunctions of unlimited growth, administrative power and the arms race. Putting this encounter differently,

the experiences of the colonisation of the Lifeworld by the Systems media of money and power have met with radical opposition. It does not follow that restricting the monetary and administrative complexity that surrounds us means surrendering modern forms of life (Habermas 1984b, xlii). Instead, communicative rationality is postulated as the preferred option to both the prevailing instrumental rationality that heightens complexity, and the anti-modern approaches that threaten the disintegration of modernity.

In summing up, Habermas's strategy over the years has been to analyse theoretic schools and to test for clues towards a synthesis, critique and clarification of concepts. He argues for a general normative theory, the acquisition of communicative competence, and an account of the conditions in which systemic distortions in communication arise (McCarthy T. 1979, xii-xiii). His critical theory is not exhausted in a theory of evolution. It reflects on past developments with the intent of projective analysis or 'plausible hypothesis' (Habermas 1992c, 61) for contemporary society as an immediate practical reference. It is intent on redeeming reason, truth, freedom and justice (Olafson 1990, 645) along with the acknowledgement of the pathologies of the Enlightenment legacy.

Part Two: How does Habermas obscure the causal agent?

What follows now is a discussion of the agent or agency in Habermas's theory and critique, with the key focus being on how the immanent logic of the philosophy of communication unfolds and obstructs rather than rescues the 'isolated' agent. Practical agency has an incomplete presence in this paradigm and Habermas's systems-lifeworld explanation of the loss of the 'good citizen of the public sphere' is left without a distinctive sense of how this *agent* of early modernity, or some other, can be empirically rejuvenated in late modernity.

While Habermas admittedly presents modernity as a practical task, there are at least three properties of his theoretic project that help to obscure the nature of the agent and with it the mechanisms of agency in the constitution of the lifeworld. The first and most important is that communicative rationality puts aside the theory of consciousness, which can have a strong notion of agency, for a theory of communication. Habermas's focus therefore moves to language and intersubjectivity and away from the ego-centred subjectivity of the empirical agent. A correlate of this paradigm shift is that the theorisation of the nature of the agent or agency is very difficult to achieve, if not untenable. The identity of agents becomes absorbed to the group. Interdependent action or needs take precedent over those of the self. While Habermas concedes to the growth of individuation and 'own achievement' in late modernity, he does not see these as replacing socially integrative accomplishments of the lifeworld (Habermas 1992a, 197).

The second is that because the project is multidimensional and of ongoing development, Habermas has been slow in working out the empirical mechanisms for personal (or ethical) action. As my discussion aims to show, this does not mean that he has been unmindful of this problem with the agent and agency, but that his tendency to respond to criticisms and to follow his prevailing interests has meant that agency has received peripheral treatment.

The third is that by virtue of his critical theory pedigree, Habermas is concerned rather more with dialectical materialism and the aspirations of the social sciences or humanism (Held 1980, 24-26) and is less concerned with the individual self. When imputing individual consciousness, Habermas's purpose is the pursuit rather of clues to his interest in symbolic structures of intersubjective integration, as when he uses his theory of discourse ethics to reconstruct the developmental stages of Kohlberg's moral consciousness. This

neglect of the individual self is also because Habermas often relies on psychology when encountering the topic of the agent (Held 1980, 252-253).

How then is one to understand Habermas's account of agency or the agent? Communicative action emphasises that formal presuppositions of intersubjectivity are the enabling force behind subjective experience (Habermas 1984b, 50). 'Only to the extent that the formal concept of an *external world* develops - of an objective world of existing states of affairs and of a social world of norms - can the complementary concept of the *internal world* or of subjectivity arise,...' (Habermas 1984b, 51). While it is the case that agents initiate and master situations, equally they are products of the lifeworld, '...products of the traditions in which they stand, of the solidary groups to which they belong, and of the socialization processes within which they grew up' (Habermas 1987b, 299). To put more strongly the idea of a non-egocentric agent or agency, and because of its immersion in interaction, the autonomous actor is a fiction of '...culturalistically one-sided, interpretive sociology' (Habermas 1987a, 149). Although his focus on intersubjectivity makes it difficult for him to propose a strong agent, Habermas can ignore agency because he deems that the developmental logic for competent actors is plausibly established in psychology (Habermas 1993, 149). Be this as it may, such a recourse to psychology carries with it the risk that the individual for counterfactual or political action can now only resist society through the group.

Also, the obfuscation of the agent and agency continues because society and culture are the two structural components that receive most of Habermas's attention as a result of their significance for driving the process of modernisation. Each of them fits with less difficulty into the larger pragmatic and political picture with which he is concerned than does personality. So because of Habermas's linguistic paradigm, in crisis laden modernity, personality is addressed specifically and almost exclusively in terms of the

agent's willingness to participate confidently *within* the collective process of communicative action and identity formation. 'If communicative action is our paradigm, the decentred subject remains as a participant in social interaction mediated by language' (McCarthy T. 1987, xvi).

Yet Habermas has not abandoned the agent of the modernity project, not without some form of reconstruction grounded upon his change to the philosophy of communication. With his *reflexive interpretive agent* of late modernity, '...: self-consciousness returns in the form of a culture become reflexive; self-determination in the form of generalized values and norms; self-realization in that of the advanced individuation of socialized subjects' (Habermas 1987b, 345). However, in his paradigm we still do not know the limits to what agents can do or how it can be done. To this effect, even while Habermas concedes that ethical-existential questions like 'who am I' and 'who do I want to be' are the more pressing in late modernity, he accentuates the question of justice because it can serve the interests of all (Habermas 1993, 151). Even while he concedes that consensus depends '...also on the power of negation and the autonomy of unique, non-substitutable subjects...' (Habermas 1991, 217), he emphasises interpersonal relations and accountability for their orientation to validity claims. Validity claims take precedent over socio-psychological experiences.

Habermas's abstract and incomplete agent or agency is a direct consequence of the immanent logic of communicative action. The substantive outcome is that little overt attention can be given to the role of personal ethics in identity construction or to the subjective processes that enable the agent of communicative action to act confidently and authentically (Olafson 1990, 645). These assertions are reinforced in two ways, first by an overview of Habermas's position on reflexivity, identity and normative critique as the manifest

capabilities of agency and second through an examination of Habermas's system-lifeworld theory put to work by Fraser (1987, 31-56).

Manifest capabilities of agency

Reflexivity in communicative action operates at the two levels of instrumental and communicative rationality. Despite his objections to the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas considers the phenomenological notions of the conscious self and the related knowledge frameworks to be necessary as a part of an intersubjective lifeworld (Habermas 1984b, 13). His emphasis though is on intersubjective understanding that is not coerced in any way, and which is due to a normative consensus grounded on validity claims as the basis of motivation (Habermas 1984b, 392). But how do these intersubjective understandings or validity claims actually emerge from or tie back into in the life of a reflexive agent/self? For Habermas these occur through maxims which '...regulate the course of daily life, modes of interaction, the ways in which problems are addressed and conflicts resolved, and so forth' (Habermas 1993, 7). How agents arrive at their personal choices and contribution to maxims is a matter that can arguably be opened to further reflection.

Despite his earlier analogy of critical theory with psychoanalysis, even if now less emphasised, Habermas pays little attention to the role of the unconscious in agent behaviour (Habermas 1987b, 298). His position is that '...the unconscious or implicit qualities of communication are built into the observable artifacts of speech itself' (Wuthnow et al. 1984, 233). They are 'part of the process of coming to understanding' (Outhwaite 1994, 130). Unconscious aspects, such as drives and needs, become observable only when understood as norms, that is, when affiliated to validity claims. While this accounts for the unconscious and aesthetic expressiveness in a manner alternate to the ego-

centred subjectivity of the philosophy of consciousness, it leaves the personal matter of therapy rather neglected.

Identity. In communicative rationality, the identity of the agent and the group is a fluid condition because it hinges upon the outcomes from the justification of validity claims. As a rule, normative consensus will monitor the stability of identity but only to the point that underlying validity claims go unchallenged. With this understanding of consensus, Habermas clearly has an abstract and shadowy view of the individual identity (Brand 1990, 121). He can have it no other way because his communicative action is concerned with the collective identity of the group without which the self-identification of the agent cannot be achieved. The self '...is not the property of an isolated subjectivity: the claim of radical authenticity depends upon recognition by others' (Hohengarten 1992a, xvii).

Then, Habermas accentuates the correlation between the developmental stages of collective and individual identities by emphasising intersubjective social integration. He distinguishes three stages of individual identity formation which occur from infancy to adulthood and which connect to the collective consciousness. He draws this evolutionary typology from Kohlberg and Piaget but is careful *not to assume any direct relationship between agency and their hierarchical frameworks*. An infant develops a *natural identity* '...based on its ability to distinguish itself from its environment; but it does not yet distinguish between physical and social objects in its environment' (White 1988, 79). Young children and adolescents both develop a *role-identity* in which they assimilate the symbolic generalities of fundamental roles, in the case of young children, and more abstract group roles in the case of adolescents. At the *ego-identity* stage, adult persons are capable of discerning between norms, and the principles that generate norms thereby being in a position to criticise norms and to assert their identities independent of concrete roles. Crises are

now resolved or balanced at a higher discursive level between the individual and the changing social reality. (Agents are now open to reflexive critique as in seeing something wrong, identifying the source and doing something about it.) But the nature of this resolution of personal crises appears to be out of direct reach of this consensus paradigm.

The strength of communicative rationality as a paradigm is in understanding the collective identity of new social movements (White 1988, 123-7). It is useful for distinguishing both 'self-limiting radicalism' and the distinctive opposition that new social movements have to the totalising tendency of the 'traditional' revolutionary movements. In these distinctions the self has been an object of culture although Habermas has recently modified this stance to include a conception of self-production (Strydom 1992, 85) or a theory of praxis. To repeat though, the process of identity formation does not clearly describe for the agent an individual and formative role in the arrival at consensus. Such a role is assumed but remains unexplained beyond the presentation of the self towards one's public, as in dramaturgical action.

Nevertheless, Habermas can get closer to an explanation of such a formative role through his dissociation or separation of *morality and ethics*. Morality refers to intersubjective agreement upon the rightness of binding norms, whereas ethics are bound to self and group identity (Hohengarten 1992a, xvii; Habermas 1993, 6). Ethics entail the directing of practical reason to the good and not merely to the possible (Habermas 1993, 4). 'They refer to what is good *for me or for us...*' (Habermas 1993, 126).

Historical forms and life histories play an important part in Habermas's understanding of morality and ethics as motives for action orientations. Moral questions can '...be decided rationally in terms of criteria of *justice* or the universalizability of interests ...' (Habermas 1990, 178). However, evaluative or ethical questions, for example, the good life, are accessible to rational

discussion only within a concrete 'form of life' or individual lifestyle. Early moral and evaluative issues were fused in the concrete ethical life of a 'naively habituated lifeworld', but in a late modern rationalised lifeworld moral issues are independent of issues of the good life. No longer do moral judgements derive their concreteness and motivational potential from an intrinsic connection of ideas of the good life and institutionalised ethical life. This separation of justice and questions of the good life by Habermas has been criticised by Charles Taylor as inappropriate on the grounds that formal criterion of justice are '..., already invariably included in a comprehensive understanding of the good life' (Honneth and Joas (eds.) 1991, 3).

This new relationship of morality and ethics must be understood in conjunction with Kohlberg's stages of moral development (cf. Habermas 1990, 122-125). In the pre-conventional and conventional levels of this development, morality and ethics are intertwined but they separate with the transition by individual agents to the post-conventional stage (Habermas 1990, 180, 183). With this release or emancipation from traditional determinants of personal identity (Hohengarten 1992a, xviii), the agent's capacity for reflexivity and practical discourse enable the agent to stand back and to question the norms and values constructive of his/her identity. Significantly then for the individual and formative role of the agent in consensus formation, morality is grounded upon universalistic rationality and communicative consensus, whereas ethics is the induction of morality into individual or collective lifestyles and identities. Habermas refers to this conversion to personal ethics as the blending of the two related levels of the justification of validity claims and the application of self-governance judgements (Habermas 1993, 36).

While Habermas's project of the decentred self integrates identity, personality, morality and ethics as action-motivating in historical forms and life histories, there still remains room for an explanation of the mechanisms or

processes of meaningful agency that will enable the blending that Habermas refers to above. Exploring meaningful agency is important in the face of Bernstein's criticism that Habermas undermines substantive meaning by giving pre-eminence to rational consensus over validity claims (1995, 199), and his other exhortation that ethical ideals of democratic civic citizenship be revisited in future forms of critical theory (1995, 234). An understanding of such mechanisms can be developed around the dissociation of morality and ethics in association with autonomous and responsible agency (Habermas 1990, 183). Furthermore, Habermas allows that agents can accommodate this gap between moral judgement and ethical action through internal behaviour controls based on principled moral judgements. The latter are autonomous and enable self-governance. They are independent of pressure from external legitimate orders, and are internalised from communicative action (Habermas 1990, 183).

Normative critique. While ego-identity is the developmental stage where agents discern between and criticise norms, the critical impact of Habermas project rests with social and system integration or culture and society. This conceptual distinction is analytical and is not intended by Habermas to detach one from the other. Social integration as norm regulated behaviour is driven by the validity claims of communicative action, and it is simply within this cultural component of society that human agency is assumed. System integration on the other hand is generally governed by instrumental action which induces differentiation and specialisation of institutions in society. It is the case for social integration that because '...validity claims can be criticized, there is the possibility of identifying and correcting mistakes, that is, learning from them' (McCarthy T. 1984, xi). The media for these conditions for a counterfactual challenge are language and praxis: the progenitors are the actors whose capacities and mechanisms *are yet to be* clarified. Conversely,

system integration threatens to engulf social integration and this threat is the driving motive for Habermas's emancipatory project rather than the power or process of healing agents or agency.

In summary then, despite his reassertion of the 'knowing subject', Habermas has neglected the role of will and has ignored agency in the process of communicative action. This scant regard for the power of the agent is due to his shift to the philosophy of communication and to the central role of values and norms for explaining the reproduction of society and everyday life for the individual. The autonomous agent is not adequately distinguished from the communicative action but is submerged within its praxis (Habermas 1991, 217-218), as is the co-ordination of action in the pre-existing lifeworld (Brand 1990, 137). Extracting the autonomous agent from the overriding intersubjective relation with others could threaten to make the project of communicative action redundant.

Systems-Lifeworld theory put to work:

Earlier I discussed how Habermas employs his systems-lifeworld theory to successfully trace historical change from classical capitalism to welfare capitalism. His analysis, which assumes the character of a political theory, sets out the conditions and processes for this transition, but stops short on the mechanisms by which agents, as the role-position and/ or lifeworld stakeholders, take part in these processes.

Fraser (1987, 31-56) offers a good example of how Habermas's systems-lifeworld theory is used to analyse advanced capitalism and the change in private/public role descriptions. In classical capitalism, paid work reproduces social identities, and '...', such production occurs via culturally elaborated social relations and symbolically mediated, norm-governed social practices...these practices...form, maintain and modify the social identities of

persons directly involved and indirectly affected' (Fraser 1987, 34). Two other fundamental and Marxian insights adopted by Habermas are that the family is tied to the economy through 'a series of exchanges conducted in the medium of money' (Fraser 1987, 41) and that roles are discernible at the private and public level. The family provides wage earners (or worker roles) as well as a demand for goods and services (or consumer roles). In this context the family represents the 'private' sphere. In the public sphere the family exchanges loyalty and tax revenues (via citizen roles) with the state in exchange for 'political decisions' (via client roles). These role positions are embedded within the lifeworld via the 'institutional orders' (cf. also Smith 1991, 156-157).

These private and public role exchanges exist between the 'systems' and within the 'lifeworld'. Between the systems, the State is the public and the Economy is the 'private'; in the lifeworld, the family is the 'private' and the political participation is the 'public'. Each of these public-private separations is co-ordinated with the other through institutional roles as illustrated below.

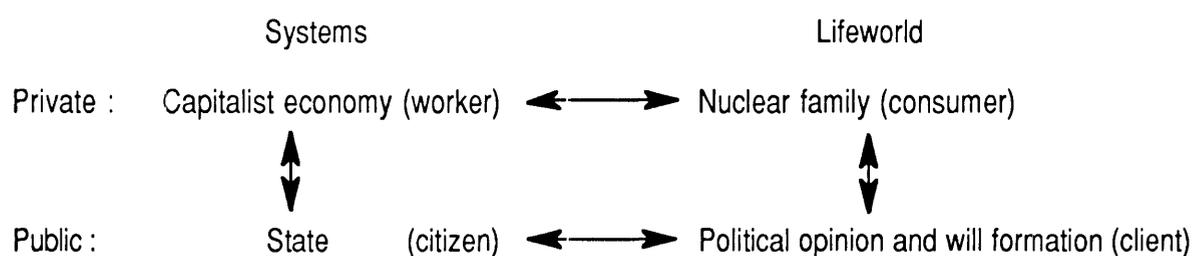


Figure 4. 1.1 Classic capitalist public-private role separations

Welfare capitalism, on the other hand, reduces the separation between public and private at the level of systems, because the State seeks to manage economic crises through shoring up the market place by creating a 'public' sector. Social and political crises are managed by compensating for the market place through welfare concessions to lobby and interest groups (Fraser 1987, 47).

Crisis induced realignments at the systems level have repercussions in the lifeworld. Worker disaffections are compensated for by increased consumerism; the importance of the citizen role is challenged by a new role of the 'social welfare client' (Fraser 1987, 47).

Welfare capitalism is epitomised by this 'colonisation of the lifeworld' by the systems through the media of money and power. Fraser illustrates this, and the attendant pathologies for the client/agent, rather forcibly:

The roles of worker and citizen cease to channel the influence of the lifeworld to the systems. Instead, the newly inflated roles of consumer and client channel the influence of the system to the lifeworld. Moreover, the intrusion of system-integration mechanisms into domains inherently requiring social integration gives rise to "reification phenomena". The affected domains are detached not merely from traditional, normatively secured consensus, but from "value-orientations *per se*". The result is the "dessication of communicative contexts" and the "depletion of the nonrenewable cultural resources" needed to maintain personal and collective identity. Thus, symbolic reproduction is destabilized, identities are threatened and social crisis tendencies develop (Fraser 1987, 48).

This change to a welfare client role prescription would then look like Figure 4.1.2. The horizontal arrows show the direction of overriding influence.

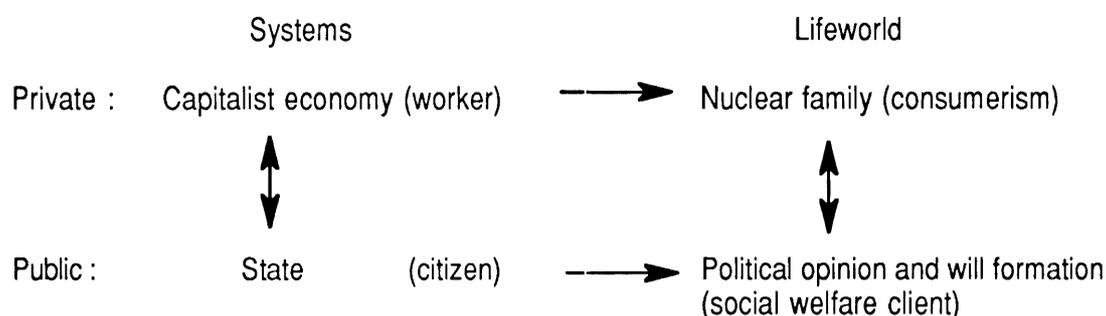


Figure 4.1.2 Welfare capitalist public-private role separations

Habermas's critique has moved away from Marx's emphasis on the paradigm of production (Pusey 1987, 28), and emphasises instead the paradigm of communication and the system - lifeworld mechanism. The new forms of social conflict now emerge at the seams of the systems and lifeworld. New social movements contest what are now the new system-induced role identities. Examples at which these movements are aimed include, the performisation of education (worker), monetarized lifestyles (consumer), bureaucratization of life problems (client) and the impoverished routine of interest politics (citizen). Class and liberation struggles of the Marxist mould are now replaced by emancipatory responses to 'crisis' in symbolic rather than material reproduction. To this extent, Habermas's critique is praiseworthy and effective. *What his critique does not make clear is both the nature of the 'citizen' agents who make up these position-practices or new social movements, and the processes and mechanisms by which they engage in personal, practical and moral/ethical action.*

Again it is the case that agent participation is only inferred, and this is understandable given the wide ranging acceptability in contemporary social theory of the need to forego theoretically prescriptive political or moral action. Yet it must be re-iterated that Habermas is kept from suggesting the process through which agents participate in such change because his theory is founded upon a paradigm of communication and a system versus lifeworld relation. There is irony in this, because communicative action sets the conditions conducive to agent participation in change and because the lifeworld, even if this is forever indeterminate, is the field of agent existence where society and selves are reproduced.

Part Three: What concepts provide opportunities to reveal the nature and process of the interpretive agent or agency?

The lifeworld is a crucial concept when exploring such opportunities because it embraces communicative rationality and language while being indefinably more than these. From the lifeworld, Habermas tells us, we are able to sociologically differentiate structural components, speech acts and the dimensions of rationality. As language is the key medium for bringing about these distinctions, it follows that the agent is a participant and decision-maker in the lifeworld to the extent that he/she is a *social being*. Nevertheless, it is becoming evident that the impact of the agent, as an autonomous-self or agent of emancipation, is side-lined in favour of the focus by communicative action on the communal-self. To re-iterate from the earlier discussion of agency, the inner-self is not absent from communicative rationality, rather, Habermas remains aloof from its complexities due to his emphasis on consensus, as has been seen earlier; due to his efforts to reconstruct the stages of Kohlberg's theory of moral development within the parameters of communicative rationality; and due to his emphasis on systems rationality which does not require that the individual agent act rationally (Habermas 1987a, 306-307). And yet, Habermas's concepts of structure, speech acts, the dimensions of rationality and open reciprocity provide opportunities to reveal the impact of agents or agency.

In communicative rationality the structural components of the lifeworld, namely, the worlds of society, culture and personality are differentiated from the lifeworld by every process of communication (Habermas 1990, 138). Society refers to 'legitimate orders' through which participants regulate group membership. Culture provides a 'stock of knowledge' for interpretation of shared understandings. Personality is defined as those competences of speech

and action that put an actor '...in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity' (Habermas 1987a, 138). These structural components of the lifeworld constitute mutual understanding amongst agents but the more formal, and parallel concepts of the objective, normative and internal 'world' '...constitute a reference system for that *about which* mutual understanding is possible:...' (Habermas 1987a, 126).

Further to his interest in moral development, Habermas relates structural components to '...a system of *world perspectives* that, in conjunction with a system of *speaker perspectives*, underlies communicative action' (Habermas 1990, 131). The integration of the two systems is achieved through argumentation which significantly is an agentic and substantive activity. Habermas uses the relationship between the two to trace the link between his own logic of societal development and the logic inherent to Kohlberg's stages of moral development. This culminates in the stage of the postconventional level at which reflexivity in communicative action sets the foundation for truly moral activity. This relationship between the 'three-worlds' and speaker perspectives is fleshed-out in the speech act and the dimensions of rationality. This complex structure of perspectives is considered by Habermas to encapsulate a decentred understanding of the world and to support a logic of development that accommodates moral development (Habermas 1990, 139). These latter attributes would appear to be a good starting point for the retrieval of the moral/ethical and, in this sense of 'taking responsibility', the healing agent of late modernity.

Speech acts, to continue in this vein of opportunity for a transformative agent or agency, are action situated and operate as the tangible units of focus for analysing the dimensions of rationality that underscore communicative action (Smith 1991, 159). '...the action situation is at the same time a speech

situation in which the actors take turns playing the *communicative roles* of speaker, addressee, and by-stander' (Habermas 1990, 135). Habermas adopts the term 'speech act' from Austin (Hunter 1994, 103) and in his usage it means that language utterances do not only state a proposition (locutionary); they also constitute an 'action' (illocutionary or that which is understood or done in saying things); and they can be designed to have an external meaning to what has been said (perlocutionary or that which '...applies to *all* those effects the speaker has on the hearer which go beyond *mere* understanding (Habermas 1991, 240)). The validity claims inherent to these utterances are the means for interpreting the speech and actions of agents.

The action or illocutionary part of the speech act indicates for agents that 'world' in which validity claims are to be assessed and legitimised, namely, the objective or the normative or the internal world. There normally is reference to all of these 'worlds' in a speech act. This means that a validity claim can be rejected on more than one ground despite the fact that one type of communicative action (see Table 4.1) is predominant in a speech act (Habermas 1991, 223). This classification into 'worlds', and their validated or warranted speech utterances, has allowed Habermas to distinguish, for sociological analysis, the correlated 'types' of communicative action. These interrelated types are classified below in Table 4.1 that I developed to enhance discussion of means for dissecting the validity claims of agents and agency. As concepts of action, they differentiate amongst the agents' reasons or validity claims which are sufficient causes of action (Hammer 1997, 230).

Table 4.1 Habermas's analytical classification of worlds, speech acts and types of communicative action.

WORLDS	TYPES OF SPEECH ACTS	PURE TYPES OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION (Dimensions of rationality)
Objective	Strategic	Teleological action
Normative (and objective)	Regulative	Norm-regulated action
Internal (and objective)	Expressive	Dramaturgical action
Objective, Normative, Internal	Constative	Communicative action (conversation)

These 'pure types' of communicative action, otherwise referred to by Habermas as 'limit cases' (Habermas 1987a, 120) or 'borderline cases' (Habermas 1991, 242), now make it possible to differentiate, from within the speech act, the analytically discrete linguistic dimensions of rationality or concepts of social action. These dimensions will become central to K-C where they will depict the modes of connection between agent's reasons and their actions. It must be remembered that these types of action do not exist in isolation of each other (Habermas 1987a, 120-121) but '...enable us to analyse the constituent elements involved in particular instances of communicative action' (Layder 1994, 190).

* Teleological action is oriented to individual goal achievement. In this sense Habermas is allowing for the self preservation of the agent of communicative rationality. 'The central concept is that of a *decision* among alternative courses of action, ..., guided by maxims, and based on an interpretation of the situation' (Habermas 1984b, 85). Such action becomes strategic action when the decision of at least one other goal-directed actor enters the initial actor's calculation of success. This form of action is

intentionalist but without the overriding emphasis that one has come to expect from earlier modernity notions of the agent/actor. Its truth claims are judged through criticisms of its effectiveness or success drawn from the fund of empirical-theoretic knowledge.

- * Norm-regulated action expresses an *agreement* that obtains in the group and which reflects cultural values. Truth claims are criticised on their claim to rightness which can be thematised (as appropriate or expected) in practical discourse.
- * Dramaturgical or expressive action refers '...to participants in interaction constituting a public for one another, before whom they present themselves. The actor evokes in his public a certain image, an impression of himself, by more or less purposefully disclosing his subjectivity' (Habermas 1984, 86). It is not spontaneously expressed behaviour but a monitored *presentation* of the self - the agent is the gatekeeper to its own subjectivity before an audience. This type of action based on desires and feelings can be criticised as insincere or authentic. Its truth claims are dealt with through therapeutic discourse.
- * Communicative action or constative speech acts (or conversation) '...refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extraverbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement' (Habermas 1984b, 86). Truth claims are criticised by partners who switch to the level of practical discourse. It is important to realise that communicative action is not just involved in the reaching of agreement or validity claims, but it is also activity in which agents '...develop, confirm, and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities' (Habermas, 1987a, 139).

When analysed through these dimensions, rationality is free from the institutionalisation of goal-rational behaviour as described by Weber (Brand 1990, 31). It has expanded to emphasise dialogue and understanding amongst agents.

The dimensions of rationality in speech acts are theoretically crucial and very useful. With them the theory of communicative rationality has the capacity to conceptualise the decision-making processes and their strategic relation to the overall life project of the critical agent - the 'citizen' - more coherently. But due to Habermas's predilection for the intersubjective over the personal, any communicative action falls short of overtly connecting the dimensions of rationality and the subjectively experienced mechanisms of practical action for that 'citizen/agent'. Personalised and healing agency, as in life politics and therapy for example, therefore remain out of reach. Such disconnection is evident also in his conceptualisation of interaction.

This brings me to an important concept of interaction (and morality) used by Habermas with the potential to generate an explanation of the causal power amongst agents. This is open reciprocity. It '...is built into action oriented toward reaching understanding' (Habermas 1990, 163). Individuals possess and undergo development in this psycho-social ability from young. This growth follows the three stages of interpretive expectations set out in Kohlberg's theory of moral development. By the postconventional stage it '...becomes the defining characteristic of a cooperative search for truth on the part of a potentially unlimited communication community' (Habermas 1990, 163). Open reciprocity is an inherent moral force which can also translate into ethical action, once agents, individual and collective, make decisions and/or take steps to act towards their own life projects or self-governance.

Part Four: Retailoring communicative action theory

The potentials of communicative rationality for restoring critical and pragmatic agency or the agent to the late modernity project appear to have a promise worth pursuing. However, communicative action has been broadly criticised (Honneth and Joas 1991; Knodt 1994, 82) with the most common theme being '... that things are not quite so cut and dried as [Habermas] presents them' (Outhwaite 1994, 109). In his turn, Habermas has responded to criticisms by clarifying misunderstandings or making corrections where these were warranted. I cannot engage all of these discussions on retailoring communicative action/rationality. Instead, I will aim to emphasise and defend the present merit of communicative action as a concept that can contribute towards an alternative, revamped approach to the agent and agency; one that revitalises the promise of the late modern agent and facilitates both therapeutic and political strategies. Essentially though, while communicative action is able to theorise some therapeutic and political action, it is *not quite* in a position to satisfactorily confront individualised practical action. Some of the more widespread criticisms included here are Habermas's understandings of communicative action; of 'judging' by the agent; of idealist rationality; and of ideal-speech. My discussion will reflect his responses to these, including the fact that his theory is incomplete (Outhwaite 1994, 1).

Is communicative action tenable?

Outhwaite has recently pointed out that '...there is a substantial body of theory which sees all social action as, in Habermasian terms, strategic, treating normatively regulated and communicative action as at best marginal deviations from the strategic principle of the pursuit of rational self-interest' (1994, 110). This means that the idea of communicative action is little more than a disguised form of its counterpart, namely, instrumental action

(Hammer 1997, 227). This criticism can be taken to include another, that both types of action impute to the agents the capacity to set and to execute goals (Outhwaite 1994, 111). Habermas is aware of the potential to misunderstand him here. His reply to the first of these criticisms - that there is little difference - is that rational-action approaches of the self-interest kind are much too narrow and overlook other forms such as moral-practical rationality which are not based on self-interest. His position on the second point - that agents both set and execute goals - is that goal-oriented action is situated at the level of the objective world whereas the understanding of goal-oriented action is situated at the linguistic level; the former is at the level of application and the latter at the level of justification. This division between the levels helps to reaffirm and consolidate the worth of the concept of communicative action, but this is achieved by analytically separating the pragmatic and the discursive.

Paradoxically, both of these criticisms attest to the value of communicative action for transcending the subject-object dualism *through praxis*. The very close blending of strategic and communicative action achieved in praxis confirms the capacity of the concept to embrace both personal and intersubjective knowledgeability simultaneously. By this I mean that the gap between the agent and intersubjectivity is significantly reduced - to the point of their being compacted upon each other in everyday life. The potential here for opacity can be reduced by clarifying the subjective and other processes that operate within the everyday praxis of the agent, interaction and system/structure. Also useful is Habermas's conceptual distinction between the objectivity of maxims and the discursive levels of communicative action. It allows the agents, should the need arise, to step out of the routine of praxis into practical discourse in order to evaluate and criticise the goals, norms, structures or cultural practices. It also provides conceptual room for locating ethics in personal agency.

Is judging tenable?

There is a fundamental '...doubt on Habermas' assumption that understanding (by agents as well as by social scientific interpreters) requires judging' (Brand 1990, 119) because such a tenet is assumed to weaken the social scientific, explanatory power of this critical theory (as against historical materialism for example). Habermas's response to this criticism is twofold. First, to avoid taking a 'yes' or 'no' position and to abstain is only to delay the interpretation further (Habermas 1984a, 239). For to show understanding of others' reasons, 'their' explanation and 'ours', requires the actors to share an *internal* relation within the universe of discourse (McCarthy T. 1984, xiii). Second:

...the evaluation of reasons, which takes place in understanding, is not equivalent to taking a 'yes' or 'no' position, as a participant in actual interaction does. The actor commits himself, with the position he takes, to a certain way of continuing the interaction (or breaking it off, as the case may be). The role of the interpreter and the actor, ..., are of course not identical' (Brand 1990, 139-140).

This problem of shifting between the two layers of participant and observer interpretation complicates matters; as does the diminished role of neo-positivist objectivity in the manner of understanding before judging. Both of these problems though remain attendant to any level of interpretation.

Habermas's admitted uncertainty about the criteria to use for critically judging forms of social life casts another point of doubt upon the tenet of judgement. This criticism about what criteria to use is supported by the recent claim that he '...rarely speaks of substantive rights' (Lash 1990, 117). Habermas's view is that a balance of the cognitive, moral and aesthetic-

expressive is all that can be presently suggested as criteria for judging. Judging is not subject to universalistic criteria. It is rather a response in practical discourse to disruptions in normative consensus amongst a group of people in the lifeworld (Cronin 1993, xxv). Also Habermas's self-criticism simply means that some areas of concern have been demonstrated from within an evolving project. The whole basis for critical theory has not fallen away (Brand 1990, 134-135).

A further problem for judging and the whole procedure of communicative discourse is that of distinguishing false from true consensus (Olafson 1990, 653). Habermas's position on this is that participation amongst agents in a discourse for the purpose of agreement about the '...correctness of a problematic norm, carries with it the supposition that a genuine agreement is possible' (McCarthy T. 1976, xvi). This idea of genuineness lies at the heart of his project of rationality and language. But what of external or practical social constraints, like ideologies for instance, that can impinge upon the 'true' consensus sought through the process of the better argument? These may be institutionalised in society, culture or personality. These constraints are overcome when '...for all participants there is a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech acts, when there is an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles' (McCarthy T. 1976, xvii). Admittedly, these conditions for consensus are prescriptive and idealic but they can, of themselves, serve as critique of the existing institutionalised means of discourse and speech. There are no guarantees or first instance formulas - people have imperfect knowledge and dialogue can be faulty - but emancipation and its opposite are potentially inherent in every act of communication and the associated judgements of agent/actors.

Is idealist rationality tenable?

Another common criticism is the fact that communicative action does not automatically imply the willingness of actors to accept the better argument (Brand 1990, 120; Layder 1994, 199). They may agree to disagree. Habermas's reply is that argumentation '...is not a decision procedure resulting in *collective decisions* but a problem-solving procedure that generates *convictions*' (Habermas 1993, 158). This last criticism points to a crucial misunderstanding about Habermas's sense of the ideal. In his view communicative action is not an ideal future condition but is rather a critical reference from whence to begin (Hohengarten 1992a, xi). It is more a procedure for 'good thinking' rather than a prescription for 'getting it right' (Taylor 1992, 85-86). Further, Habermas does not maintain that argumentation or moral consensus demands compliance. It is rather the case that distorted communication is the most frequent state of affairs '...for the ideal-speech situation to have its transcendental existence and thus its critical power' (Kilminster 1991, 94).

Is idealic-speech tenable?

This question arises from suggestions that ideal-speech situations play no part in the mechanisms of social criticism (Rorty 1984, 35). Habermas is pre-eminently concerned with ideal-speech circumstances as the counterfactual context for communicative action. Ideal-speech situations are distinct from speech-acts. They refer to the condition of free, equal and unfettered debate. Two other strong criticisms of his position on idealic speech are first, that communicative action does not take place in ideal environs '...with rational individuals simply discussing common interests and values' (Wuthnow et al. 1984, 238), but when people relate to the material environment of the lifeworld; second, that once constructed '..., the ideal-speech situation would then lose its critical function' (Kilminster 1991, 94). These two criticisms are endemic to

critical theory as much as they are to Marxism. Habermas's view would be consistent with his arguments in defense of his communicative rationality: which is essentially that legitimation through validity claims and communicative competence is the overriding standard for his universalistic project of emancipation (Habermas 1984a, 231; Rorty 1984, 32, 34). Dandeker (1983, 205-206) thinks that ideal-speech is a good ideal for a critical and realist theory to start from, if it is to achieve any specific impact on society.

The purpose for this examination of the criticisms of communicative action has been to defend its merits for redressing the diminution of responsive, critical and ethical agency. Nevertheless, questions still remain if this loss of responsive agency is to be answered more fully. What are the subjective processes and mechanisms of communicative interaction that reflexively integrate the agent and society and how are they manifested? How does the agent come to execute collective action and critique? I have suggested that concepts of Habermas's project that particularly enable these questions to be resolved include the structural components, speech acts, the dimensions of rationality and open reciprocity. But these will need to be re-assembled as part of a plausible synthesis involving Habermas's concept of 'communicative competence' with Giddens's concept of 'knowledgeability' if the nature and process of transformative agency is to be clarified.